

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. **In Maryland, rabies is found most often in raccoons, skunks, foxes, cats, bats, and groundhogs.** Other mammals, including dogs and farm animals, can also get rabies. Rabies is rarely reported in rabbits and small rodents such as squirrels, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, rats, and mice. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear.

## How is rabies spread?

**The rabies virus is found in the saliva of rabid animals and is usually passed from animal to animal or animal to human through bites.**

Nonbite exposures from animals (other than bats) rarely cause rabies. Examples of nonbite exposures include animal saliva coming into contact with open wounds, the eyes, nose, or mouth, or possibly, scratches. Other contact, such as petting a rabid animal and contact with blood, urine, or feces of a rabid animal are not exposures.



The rabies virus is inactivated (killed) by heat, sunlight, and drying. If the material containing the virus is dry, it won't cause rabies.

The rabies virus is also inactivated by many common detergents and disinfectants.

## How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

Animals with rabies often show changes in behavior. Wild animals with rabies may act friendly, while domestic animals may become aggressive. Rabid animals may stagger, drool a lot, or become paralyzed. Animals that are usually active only at night may become active during the day. **However, it is important to remember that animals with rabies may spread the virus even when they show no signs of the disease.**

## Protect your pets... immunize

**In Maryland, dogs, cats, and ferrets four months of age and older must be vaccinated against rabies.** A second shot must be given one year later. After the first two vaccinations, booster doses of vaccine are needed every one to three years, depending on the particular vaccine used. There are also rabies vaccines that are approved for use in horses, cattle, and sheep.



## If you have been bitten or exposed...

Immediately wash the wound with soap and lots of water. If available, use a disinfectant (such as povidone-iodine solution) to flush the wound. Get the name and address of the animal's owner, and find out if the animal is up-to-date on its rabies shots. If there is no owner, remember what the animal looked like. If you were bitten by a wild animal, try to capture or confine the animal if you can do so safely; if the animal must be killed, try not to damage its head. Seek medical attention promptly and be sure to report the bite or exposure to your local animal control agency, health department, or police.

## What will happen to my pet if it bites someone?

A dog, cat, or ferret that bites or exposes a person will be quarantined for ten days. The quarantine is usually done at home.

## What should I do if my pet has been bitten ?

If your pet had contact with a wild or stray animal, do not touch the wild or stray animal and avoid touching your pet with bare hands. Consult your veterinarian and report the incident to your local animal control agency, health department, or police.

If your pet has been in a fight with an owned dog, cat, or other domestic animal, get the owner's name, address, and telephone number, and consult your veterinarian. Contact your local animal control agency or health department for further recommendations.



## Beware of bats...

Most of the recent human cases of rabies have been caused by rabies virus from bats. **Whenever there is a possible human exposure to a bat, the bat should be safely collected, if possible, and tested for rabies.** Although people usually know when a bat has bitten them, bats have small teeth that may not leave obvious marks. Therefore, if a bat is not available for testing, treatment should be considered for people who were in the same room as a bat and who might not know that a bite or direct contact occurred (for example, a sleeping person awakens to find a bat in the room or an adult sees a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person).

Prevent bats from entering your home by using window screens and chimney caps and by closing any openings greater than 1/4 inch by 1/2 inch. Call your local health department for more information about bats and rabies.



## Rabies vaccines for humans

There is a treatment that is effective in preventing rabies in humans if given soon after an exposure. It consists of a series of five vaccinations given in the arm over a one-month period. In addition, an injection of rabies immune globulin (RIG) is given at the time of the first vaccination; RIG is usually given around the wound.







People who may be at increased risk for rabies exposure (such as veterinarians and their staff, animal control and wildlife workers, and rabies laboratory workers), should get a pre-exposure rabies vaccination series that consists of three shots in the arm. International travelers should consider pre-exposure vaccination if they are likely to come in contact with animals in an area where dog rabies is common and prompt access to appropriate medical care may be limited.

People who have received the pre-exposure series need to have only two booster doses of vaccine if exposed to a rabid animal (no RIG).

Consult your local health department or health care provider for more details.

**Remember:**  
**Rabies is Deadly!**

*Protect your family and pets...*

-  Have your dogs, cats, and ferrets vaccinated regularly.
-  Do not let pets roam free.
-  Do not touch or feed wild or stray animals.
-  Avoid sick animals and those acting in an unusual manner.
-  Teach children to stay away from wild animals and animals they don't know.
-  Cover garbage cans securely and do not leave pet food outside (both may attract wild and stray animals).
-  Prevent bats from entering your home.
-  Report bites and other animal exposures to your local health department, animal control agency, or police.



For more information about rabies,  
contact your  
local health department.



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**DHMH**

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**Take a**

**BITE**

**Out of  
Rabies**

